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LIBRARY READING IN THE HIGH SCHOOL

II

SOME MECHANICAL DETAILS

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The best place to carry on library-reading work is in a library. Here, seated informally about a table, the teacher and pupils may confer in a free-and-easy manner upon any subject in hand; and, turning to the catalogue, or the shelves, they may settle any disagreement or uncertainty which arises, and find new material always within reach. The school library is the most suitable place for such conferences; but, lacking that, the city library, if not too far from the schoolhouse, will be an admirable center for the general study of books. If, however, there is no room available in either school or city library, the next best thing is to be contented with an ordinary classroom, giving it as much as possible of a literary atmosphere.

The size of classes may vary, but it is not advisable to include a larger number than twelve in any one class. A smaller number is better, because it allows of more individual work. As a rule, those pupils should be grouped together who are doing the same year's work in the high-school course. There will then be more uniformity of ability and attitude, and the results will be in every way more satisfactory. The teacher may take the names of all the students who have no classes at a certain hour, then group them in sections of ten or twelve each, putting those together who are in the same stage of the high-school work; these groups will meet for recitation at the same hour of the day, but on different days of the week. Usually, one recitation in a fortnight is sufficient, but when the work is new, it may be desirable to have each class meet once a week.

As to the amount of work to be done: For the ordinary pupil a reasonable requirement is one book in two weeks, or an average

of sixteen or eighteen books in a school year. Those who read easily will accomplish more; a considerable number will do less, because of poor eyesight, illness, music lessons, heavy school work, pure laziness, or indifference. As a usual thing it is well to have it understood that everyone is expected to do the amount indicated, and then, if necessary, individual arrangements can be made to fit the cases that arise. The teacher should listen respectfully to any objections which parents make, no matter how misguided such objections may be. It is perfectly natural that a mother should wish her daughter to put a certain amount of time on her music, and it is perfectly right that a child who is not well should have his burdens lightened in any reasonable way. Those who assign lessons and make requirements are very prone to forget that nervous energy is like a bank account: that what is drawn out for use on one occasion cannot be used on another. In almost all cases where the library work is concerned, a compromise can be made as to the amount of reading to be done. If not, the teacher must yield gracefully to the exigencies of the occasion, and depend upon the interest of the pupil to settle the matter.

As to the nature of the reading in the different high-school years, a word may be said. First-year pupils will usually be willing to read only fiction, though the better readers will be attracted by accounts of travels, or books which relate to school work. Among the physical geography students a few may enjoy Kennan's *Tragedy of Pelee*, or Lucas' *Animals of the Past*, or Martin's *Story of a Piece of Coal*. If Greek and Roman history are given in the first year, the pupils will read Church's *Story of the Iliad*, Lamb's *Ulysses*, Perry's *Boy's Odyssey*, or Brook's *Story of the Aeneid*. The freshman problem depends so much upon what has been done in the grades that it is difficult to make any definite statement of first-year work. In general it seems well to carry it on in connection with the composition or literature class, as a closer supervision can be exercised in this way, and individual interests more accurately noted.

The sophomore reading is much like that of the first year, though somewhat more extended. Juniors ought to begin to take

a fairly serious view of their reading, and to develop a certain ambition for self-culture. Seniors, after several years of library work, should be able to do a considerable amount of solid, non-fiction reading. They should take with them from the high school an actual desire to broaden their literary knowledge, and a real, if elementary, ability to pick and choose. In the senior class, centralized reading on certain subjects may be done, and a more completely organized course may be pursued. Reports ought to be better prepared, and more satisfactorily given.

In any class, the question of finishing a distasteful book is likely to arise. Ought one to insist on a pupil's completing every book he commences, whether he likes it or not? In answer, let the teacher ask herself the question, "Should I like to be forced to read each book that I begin, no matter how tedious I find it?" If a pupil has given a book a fair trial, and is convinced that it is not to his taste, there is little to be gained by insisting upon his finishing it. While he is plodding half-heartedly through it, he might be reading and enjoying two or three other volumes, and very likely getting more real good out of them. There is, one must admit, a danger in this theory, as a pupil might possibly acquire a habit of beginning books, and throwing them aside, *ad libitum*. This is actually not the case, however, as he knows he is expected to complete a satisfactory number of books for his library-reading record, and he can usually be led to select something that will interest and hold him. What is gained in good will by allowing pupils to drop uninteresting books far over-balances whatever may be lost.

Correlation of library reading with the other work of the school can be systematically and very profitably done. By conferring with the instructors in other subjects, the library-reading teacher can make out lists of books for the collateral study of such topics as the pupils become interested in. In history and literature there is, of course, excellent opportunity for co-operation of the kind suggested; in certain lines of science, as physical geography, geology, biology, and botany, there is really a much wider opportunity than would at first appear. Consultation with the science teacher insures the exclusion of books written in an unscientific

spirit, and those that might corrupt the desire for accurate research. In art, domestic science, manual training, and music, much supplementary reading is possible, if the library-reading teacher will take the trouble to prepare suitable lists under the approval of the regular teachers of these subjects. This means hard, close labor, and the more or less hasty perusal of many volumes; but the teacher will feel repaid in her greater grasp of all the school work, her own wider knowledge, and the larger ability she has to reach her pupils.

The foundation of all the library work will be the lists prepared by the teacher, as she then knows what books the pupils will report on, and is familiar with the contents, or at least the nature, of each book. Pupils may, however, report on books not on the lists, provided that they speak previously to the teacher concerning them. In this way, the boys and girls have more individual liberty of choice, and, still, reports on unsuitable books may be avoided.

As to giving the pupils marks or grades on the library-reading work, or inflicting penalties for reading undone, it would appear that these two things are entirely unnecessary, and that they destroy the fine flavor of the work. Relying upon the interest which good books have for well-regulated human beings, the teacher is endeavoring to train the pupils to an individual appreciation, depending upon their own personal development. Any attempt to reduce their progress to figures is assuredly to be deprecated; and punishing them because they are unliterary and uncultivated is certainly absurd. If this be true, all marks and penalties are out of place in library reading.